Adaptation of Practicum in An EFL Pre-service Teacher Education Program in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis: A SWOT Analysis

Ali İlya, Department of Foreign Languages Education, Sakarya University, Sakarya, Türkiye, ailya@sakarya.edu.tr

Ayşegül Daloğlu, Department of Foreign Languages Education, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye, daloglu@metu.edu.tr

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Ali ilya[1], Ayşegül Daloğlu[2]

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ABSTRACT

The global pandemic forced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs to revisit their traditional practices to adapt to the emergency conditions. As a part of such adaptations, practicum was moved to the online modality, and all groups of stakeholders experienced unprecedented times. With an awareness of the point of no return marked by the COVID-19, we explored the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of adaptation of practicum in an EFL pre-service teacher education program. Designing a qualitative case study, we collected data from student teachers (STs), school-based mentor teachers (SMTs), and university-based teacher educators (UTEs). The findings revealed that although the imposed conditions caused both internal and external challenges for all the stakeholders, they also produced precious implications. It was mainly concluded that online components need to become an integral part of any regular practicum course; thus, a framework, redefinition of mentors' roles and responsibilities, and accessible digital resources are among the musts while the digital divide still poses the main threat.

The COVID-19 crisis has unsettled professionals in all fields all around the world as the regular, well-established routines have been of no use. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education, as one of these fields, was also forced to review its traditional practices to correspond with the emerging requirements and deal with the imposed constraints. School closures in almost every country as a part of the safety measures unprecedently accelerated the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as all the courses were moved to distance teaching platforms (Krishnapatria, 2020; Yi & Jang, 2020). The International Association of Universities Global Survey that was conducted in early 2020 with the participation of 424 higher education institutions from 109 countries revealed that 67% of the institutions

replaced brick-and-mortar education with more flexible alternatives including hybrid, blended, and emergency online teaching (Marinoni et al., 2020). Although the sudden and unexpected transition posed challenges in all types of courses, the need for adaptation in the practice-based components of the curriculum further raised to prominence. Practicum, as one of such components in EFL teacher education programs, was also modified in different forms to respond to the requirements of the confinement periods (Ersin, Atay, & Mede, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Koşar, 2021; Robinson & Rusznyak, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Already overwhelmed by the uncertainties and distress of a pandemic, student teachers (STs), school-based mentor teachers (SMTs), and university-based teacher educators (UTEs) were tested on their agility during the practicum process (Babanoğlu, 2021; Güngör, 2022; Waswa & Çelik, 2021). All the stakeholders faced the primary difficulty of acting in a completely new mode of instruction. Online teaching added burdens not only as a new medium, which requires a different understanding and a set of skills (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Compton, 2009) but also as an alternative that violated togetherness and made the digital divide more visible (Assunçao Flores & Gago, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). While SMTs and UTEs were in a tough endeavor to adapt their own courses to the online medium (Güngör, 2022), which was new to the majority, they undertook the responsibility of providing mentorship for the STs at a distance. On the other side, STs were immersed in online spaces for observation and teaching without sufficient theoretical background and readiness as many pre-service teacher education programs were previously reported not to adequately prepare STs for online teaching or ICT integration (Kessler, 2006; OECD, 2018).

Besides the challenges, the emerging online medium of practicum also provided opportunities for all three groups of stakeholders, i.e., STs, SMTs, and UTEs (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Ferdig et al., 2020). In many contexts, as Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot (2020) conclude, "what began in the first weeks as emergency remote learning in a crisis situation, a sort of survival mode, has slowly evolved into well-planned quality online learning" (p. 592). Acquaintance with the online mode of learning and teaching (Ersin, Atay, & Mede, 2020), developed reflective practices (Güngör, 2022), genuine innovations (Kidd & Murray, 2020), and improved self-efficacy and adaptive learning (König, Jager-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020) were among the positive outcomes reported so far. Thus, it can be stated that the COVID-19 crisis has taught valuable lessons in the form of both challenges and opportunities to the whole world of pre-service teacher education in terms of practicum contexts, and implications that can be made out of these lessons may illuminate the practices in the long run on the grounds that advancing technology will force teacher education programs to add online components to the practicum courses and research on this specific topic will be of use. As a part of the body of limited literature addressing the advantages and drawbacks of the adaptations in the practicum in EFL teacher education programs, the current research study mainly aims to explore the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of a practicum course moved to the online medium from the perspectives of STs, SMTs, and UTEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Practicum in Pre-service Teacher Education Programs Prior to the COVID-19

Practicum has been defined in various other ways in the literature: teaching practice in supervised form (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Farrell, 2008; Ochieng'Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011), internship, induction (Collinson et al., 2009), clinical experience (Ochieng'Ong'ondo & Jwan, 2009), field-based experience (Crandall, 2000), and school teaching (Farrell, 2008). They synonymously denote a maturation process in which EFL STs "shift from students of teaching to teachers of students" (Cirocki, Madyarov, & Baecher, 2020, p. 2) through situated and social learning that entails close collaboration among the stakeholders. A typical practicum course involves the active participation of three primary groups: STs (mentees, pre-service teachers), SMTs

(mentor teachers, cooperating teachers, host teachers), and UTEs (faculty members or university supervisors) (Cirocki, Madyarov, & Baecher, 2020). As collaboration among the stakeholders is at the core of an effective practicum, a common understanding in terms of aims, standards, and assessment has been deemed to be a requisite (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). In addition, as the learning is primarily social, the qualifications of mentors and their willingness to collaborate are crucial. In other words, both SMTs and UTEs need to be aware that "they are looking at a vital window of opportunity to recreate the profession" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010). Due to the recognized value of practicum in STs' initial identity construction, it has been well-researched prior to the pandemic, and they somehow pointed to the modelling, guidance, hands-on practice, interaction, and reflection as integral to an effective practicum (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010; Rowley, 1999). Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage's (2007) following characterization of a resultful practicum is illuminative:

If teachers are to be effective, they must work in settings where they can use what they know—where, for example, they can come to know students and families well; work with other teachers to provide a coherent, well-grounded curriculum; evaluate and guide student progress using information-rich assessments; and use texts and materials that support thoughtful learning (p. 54).

The extract above recapitulates the prominent features of a desirable practicum, and by any means, they all require social learning, the interaction between environment and individual, and immersion into authentic contexts. However, the COVID-19 outbreak disrupted all such aforementioned qualities as it enforced strict measures that involved social distancing and school closures for global safety reasons. Given the context sensitivity, different institutions responded in their own ways to the emerging restrictions, and the research within that scope reveals common challenges, opportunities, and insights for the future.

2.2 Responses from Different Practicum Contexts to the Global Pandemic

The forced online move in practicum has dislocated the deeply rooted routines and required the institutions to redesign the spaces of learning through constant references to the past (Kidd & Murray, 2020). In order to capture the interim practices, assess the "new normal" for long-term implications, and explore stakeholders' understanding of the unexpected shift in practicum; a number of research studies in different contexts have been conducted. In England, Kidd & Murray (2020) investigated educators' perspectives through a qualitative orientation in the early stages of school closures. The authors featured the blend of "sameness and difference" in the new modality, that is, the traditional principles and relationships were reframed within the online spaces. Kidd & Murray (2020) revealed that initial difficulties educators experienced while discovering the new learning setting were substituted by innovations and technological attainments as outcomes of increased confidence in the process. Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot (2020) described the case in Israel and concluded that although the pandemic launched an unwelcomed process in practicum, it brought along learning gains such as stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and practice schools, STs' discovery of and experimentation with the online medium, and mutual learning among the partners. Robinson & Rusznyak (2020) delineated the learning outcomes and challenges in the South African context in terms of the practicum courses. Similarly, they addressed opportunities afforded by the new medium; however, they additionally called attention to the increasing relatedness of school and home contexts, growing replacement of individual learning with interdependence, and escalating realization of the technological haves and have-nots. Assunçao Flores & Gago (2020) also mentioned the inequalities concerning access to digital resources and technology. Inquiring into the responses to the school shutdowns in Portugal, Assunçao Flores & Gago (2020) reported the additional challenges teachers identified as maintaining students' active engagement, lack of sufficient training on teaching online, time

management, and lack of parental support. In another study, Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison (2020) investigated the challenges and opportunities online practicum posed as perceived by STs in Chile. The authors manifested mainly the negativities experienced by the STs. They foregrounded the lack of interaction both between STs and pupils and between SMTs and STs as the toughest drawback. The digital divide was similarly underlined. In addition, the discomfort STs felt due to the abrupt change in the medium and underdeveloped teacher identity because of lack of immersion into authentic contexts were pointed out. Parallel results were reported in some other research studies from different contexts as well including Canada (Burns et al., 2020) and Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2020).

Turkey was among the countries where the practicum was managed online during the COVID-19 lockdown, and several studies addressed the topic from various perspectives. In one of the earliest studies, Ersin, Atay, and Mede (2020) pointed to the contributions online practicum experience made to STs' technology competence and concluded that online teaching skills need to be separately addressed. The study of Koşar (2021), on the other hand, revealed that STs could not benefit from online practicum and opted for face-to-face training; however, it needs to be noted that the whole process was paper-based, and no practice was included. In more recent studies, Güngör (2022) and Korucu Kış (2021) both employed action research design to explore STs' online practicum experience. Korucu Kış (2021) sought an answer to the main question if engaging STs into vicarious experience of critical incidents in a collaborative online setting would lead to meaningful learning. It was primarily yielded that the experience boosted STs' confidence, contributed to STs' pedagogical content knowledge, raised STs' awareness of multiple perspectives, and helped STs think more competently on problems. Güngör (2022) adapted action research into an online practicum through a four-stage process: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The constraints identified by the STs were considered to design lesson plans, which were implemented by SMTs in their online classes. STs reflected on the observations of SMTs' classes, and it was mainly concluded that STs benefited from the process and ended the term with a heightened awareness. Güngör (2022) suggested based on the evidence that online practicum should be a part of the teacher education curriculum and more research addressing specific components of the online practicum is needed. As distinct from these studies, Babanoğlu (2021) explored the perspectives of STs, SMTs, and UTEs altogether. While the low level of student participation and technology-related problems were identified as the common challenges, improved online teaching skills and the discovery of digital tools were reported as common opportunities.

2.3 Significance of the Study and the Research Question

The previous research has already put forward that online teaching skills need to be separately addressed (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Compton, 2009; Shin & Kang, 2018; Stickler & Hampel, 2015); however, it has also been demonstrated that pre-service EFL teacher education programs do not adequately prepare STs for online teaching (Hubbard, 2008; OECD, 2018). In order to address the requirement of training digitally competent EFL teachers in the post-COVID era, teacher education programs most likely accelerate the plans to redesign their curriculum, a fundamental component of which is practicum. In the process of curriculum adaptation, evidence-based research is a precious asset but research on teacher education for online teaching, especially on online practicum, is quite scarce (Karam et al., 2020; Shin & Kang, 2018). Although a limited number of studies addressed online practicum in Turkey so far, most of them did not explore contexts in which STs taught online to students at practice schools (Ersin, Atay, & Mede, 2020; Güngör, 2022; Koşar, 2021), but they simulated teaching with other STs or completed practicum only through paper-based tasks. Moreover, previous studies in Turkey generally investigated online practicum experience through STs' perspective and other groups' perspectives (SMTs and UTEs) were rarely researched. Then, the present study is among the leading attempts as it both explores online practicum with

authentic teaching experience of the STs in the planned online teaching period and covers the perspectives of three groups of stakeholders. The study seeks answers to the following research question:

• What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of adapting practicum in an EFL teacher education program to the online modality from the perspectives of student teachers (STs), school-based mentor teachers (SMTs), and university-based teacher educators (UTEs)?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

"The more we study human affairs (as contrasted with physical mechanisms), the more we expect that things will work differently in different situations" righteously says Stake (2010, p. 26). Thus, this study adopts a qualitative research design, which is also known as "the science of the particular" as it primarily aims to probe into the participants' subjective interpretations of adaptations in the practicum upon a global crisis to draw sound conclusions for achieving lasting teacher education. It is defined as a case study because it is bounded in terms of the number of participants, the context, and the time period.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

Maximum variation sampling strategy as one of the purposive sampling techniques was applied to choose the participants. Three groups of participants took part in the study: STs, SMTs, and UTEs. Among 50 STs who took Practicum I, 14 STs participated in the study. As grade points average (GPA) was revealed to be a potential determinant of learning outcomes or course satisfaction, it was used as a criterion, and heterogeneity in GPAs was maintained. Half of the STs attended a state school while the other half attended a private school. Six STs were male while eight STs were female. STs' ages ranged between 21 and 24.

Ten SMTs among thirteen were selected. Similarly, variety among SMTs in terms of years of teaching experience and mentorship, last degree earned, and type of school and grade level was ensured. The group consisted of both experienced and novice SMTs, and both BA and MA graduates. Six SMTs were working at a middle school and four SMTs at a high school. All the SMTs had at least two years of teaching experience and were certified to work as SMTs. Eight SMTs were female while two were male. As the third group, five UTEs participated in the study. Two of the UTEs held a PhD degree while the other three were MA graduates. They had English language teaching experience from one to twenty-two years and mentorship experience from one to eight years. Three UTEs were female while two were male. One of the UTEs was the first author of this paper, and he acted both as a researcher and a UTE.

All the participants were informed about the research in detail, and their rights as participants, and asked to sign an electronic copy of the informed consent form. They were all guaranteed that the data would remain confidential, and they were free to withdraw at any time. Moreover, the approval of the Human Subjects Ethics Committee was obtained.

3.3 Context

The data were collected in the fall term of 2020-2021 academic year, during which schools at all levels were mostly kept closed due to safety measures in Turkey. It should also be noted that as it was the second academic term following the outbreak of the pandemic, online education was carried out in a planned way. The courses were offered fully online. There were two primary types of settings: a large-scale, state university in Turkey and K-12 schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). All the STs

and UTEs were from the department of English Language Teaching (ELT) of the same university. The SMTs were from different state and private schools. The SMTs had their online classes on various synchronous web-conferencing platforms including Zoom, Google Meet, and the platform of Educational Informatics Network of the MoNE.

The STs are required to take two practicum courses in the last year of the four-year undergraduate program. In Turkey, the practicum courses are managed according to the protocol signed between the MoNE and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in 1998. The requirements, task descriptions, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, and many other details are specified in this document, but it must be noted that it does not address online teaching at all. Each practicum course is worth 10 ECTS credits, lasts 12 weeks, and comprises two theoretical and six practice hours. While theoretical hours are supervised by a UTE, practice hours are managed by a SMT. Each UTE and SMT could be assigned not more than 8 STs. Prior to COVID-19, both practicum courses were managed in a regular face-to-face mode, which did not cover online teaching.

3.4 Procedure

- Step 1/Week 1: Groups of three or four STs are arranged, assigned to a SMT and UTE, and all the stakeholders met in a synchronous online meeting to discuss the expectations, plan the schedule, and negotiate the requirements and responsibilities.
- Step 2/Weeks 2-5:
  (1) In practice hours: STs attended the assigned SMT's online classes according to the arranged schedule, observed the classes in the light of the prompts of weekly observation tasks, and kept notes for their weekly observation reports. The reports addressed different aspects of online teaching e.g., basic ICT competencies, exploiting digital resources, maintaining online socialization, online classroom management, promoting students' autonomy and creativity at a distance, preparing, and adapting online materials etc. The weekly reports and all the other written documents were submitted online on Google Classroom.
  (2) In theoretical hours: STs met with the assigned UTE in an online web conference to discuss the observations and reflect on the critical moments. Each UTE assigned some reading articles on the methodology of online language teaching. The UTEs trained STs on the distinctive aspects of online spaces, teaching methodology, affordances and constraints of some digital tools, and ways of maintaining online communication.
- Step 3/Weeks 6-7: STs prepared their first online teaching session, shared the lesson plan with the assigned UTE and SMT, and carried out their implementations. Other STs, SMT, and UTE monitored the online session, took notes, and shared feedback with the ST. The ST reflected on the teaching session. Samples selected by a UTE from teaching sessions were observed altogether within a practicum group, and STs collaborated to discuss the ways of improvement.
- Step 4/Weeks 8-11: Subsequent to the first teaching implementation and follow-up procedures, each ST was asked to prepare an action plan for desired improvements. Based on the action plan, reflection, feedback, further observations of the assigned SMT's classes, and group discussions, each ST prepared the consecutive teaching implementations. The procedures described in Step 3 were perpetuated for the next three online teaching implementations.
- Step 5/Week 12: STs were asked to reflect on the whole process both in written and verbal forms, suggest any improvements for the forthcoming designs of online practicum, and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The STs provided longitudinal data while the SMTs and UTEs were consulted at the end of the practicum. To collect data from the STs, weekly reflective journals, weekly focus group discussions, and an open-ended survey were used. Every week the STs were asked to reflect on their practicum experience from different perspectives. They were given certain prompts as substance to stimulate their thinking, but they were also told that they were free to add anything else. They wrote either in English or in their first language. The STs submitted their reflective journals online on Google Classroom before the deadline. The STs were divided into two focus groups, and with each group, weekly focus group discussions were held online to elaborate further on the reflective journal data. Similarly, the first author initiated and moderated the discussions, and the STs revealed their opinions. The focus group discussions were all in Turkish, which is STs' first language. In addition to the process-oriented data from the STs, an open-ended survey was devised, piloted, and sent to the STs to gather data about their overall assessment. To collect data from the SMTs and UTEs, two separate open-ended surveys were devised. Following the piloting and revision stages, the surveys were sent online to the SMTs and UTEs. For the piloting stage, two SMTs and two UTEs were given the surveys. The items were revised by the authors based on the participants' responses. In order to gain a deeper insight into the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four SMTs and two UTEs. The interviews were in Turkish, and the questions were determined by both authors based on the preliminary analysis of the data from the surveys. The data collection tools are available in Appendices.

3.6 Data Analysis

The audio data were transcribed verbatim, and all the texts were organized according to the participant group, labeled, ordered, and made available for analysis. The data in Turkish was translated into English, and the Microsoft Word was utilized to convert speech to text. Subsequent to extensive reading and getting familiar with the data, first-cycle and second-cycle coding methods were visited to choose the most appropriate one/s based on the unique nature of the qualitative data. For the first cycle, descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and process coding were collectively used. The initially emerging codes were reviewed for reduction and synthesis of the data corpus. In the second cycle, axile coding was used to "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' and 'fractured' during the Initial coding process" (Saldana, 2009, p. 159). Then, it was followed by theoretical coding to check if any prior theories explain or present the emerging categories and codes in a more organized form. It was revealed that the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis framework fits well with our findings as the participants referred both to advantages and drawbacks to the adaptation of the practicum to the online modality, and the explanations for the positive and negative aspects were both internal and external. In the SWOT Analysis, while strengths and weaknesses are internal, opportunities and threats are external forces that affect the strategic planning for the future. Similarly, the participants explained the advantages and drawbacks both through internal and external sources. As the research was primarily conducted for the planning of "the new normal," the SWOT analysis framework was applied. Certain quotes were frequently used as "the evidentiary warrant" (Saldana, 2009, p. 16).

4. Findings

The SWOT analysis results will be separately presented for each group of participants; thus, this section is organized accordingly.

4.1 Student Teachers' Perspectives

The categories and sub-categories emerging as a result of the data analyses of the SWOT from STs' perspectives are presented in Table 1.

The strengths identified by STs for adapting practicum to the online modality fell into two categories: SMT and UTE-related strengths and collaborative environment. The data analyses revealed that SMTs and UTEs were the most frequently mentioned variables that have an impact both on the strengths and weaknesses. Qualified mentors were marked as the primary strength of the process as captured in the following quotes:

> In my point of view, the most important characteristic is the interaction between university-based teacher educator and pre-service teachers. Also, raising pre-service teachers' awareness of their weaknesses has a big impact on improvement. (ST6)

> Good mentor teachers like people who know how to teach online, people who know how to integrate technology to their lessons, people who encourage their students, and people who really want to teach being a teacher are the greatest chances. (ST5)

Detailed feedback on teaching sessions and high-quality e-mentoring practices were also reported among the strengths. The STs attributed their improvement in online teaching mainly to the UTEs' and SMTs' feedback. They valued UTEs' feedback especially after their teaching performances while SMTs' feedback before the teaching as they said that SMTs' familiarity with the teaching context and target groups of students helped the STs plan more appropriate classes, and UTEs' feedback raised their awareness of the theoretical aspects. ST4's following remarks illustrate the first category:

> My best assistant and my best friend were the feedback given by my university-based instructor. The feedback enlightened my way of online teaching. I was an inexperienced student in terms of online teaching, but the feedback improved me. (ST4)

Table 1
SWOT Analysis Results from Sts' Perspectives

Strengths	Weaknesses
SMT and UTE-related strengths	*Course design*
- Qualified mentors	- Inconvenient written tasks
- Detailed feedback on teaching sessions	- Insufficient background in online teaching
- High-quality e-mentoring practices	- Lack of a common framework
- Clear expectations	- Lack of an objective assessment mechanism
Collaborative environment	*SMT and UTE-related problems*
- Weekly online web conferences	- Inconsistencies among SMTs and UTEs
- Video-enhanced group discussions	- SMTs' negative attitude towards online teaching
- Effective communication among members	- Inadequate interactivity in SMTs' classes
- Personalized tasks and activities	- SMTs' lack of prior experience and background
	- Mentors' lack of motivation for guidance
	Resources
	- Insufficient number of available course materials

	- Difficulties with reaching the resources	
	- Lack of a rubric designed for online observations	
Opportunities	**Threats**	
Facilities provided by online modality	- Digital divide	
- Having a chance to observe multiple SMTs	- Lack of an audit mechanism	
- Advantages of lack of commuting	- Negative perceptions of online teaching	
	- Difficulty in building rapport with students	
Technology-related issues	- Lack of support of body language	
- Rapidly advancing technology		
- Gaining familiarity with online resources		
- Gaining experience in online modality		

Clear expectations were reported as the last strength under the first category. The STs shared their observations that expectations significantly varied among both UTEs and SMTs especially because of the novelty of online practicum, thus the STs reported that having a syllabus that clarifies the expectations helped them in some practicum groups.

Under the second category of strengths, the STs addressed collaborative environment. As the process was managed at a distance, the STs stated that it was easier for them to get alienated; and hence, having weekly online web conferences, video-enhanced group discussions, effective communication among group members, and personalized tasks and activities were counted as the sub-categories for the strengths. ST2 expressed in her own words the value of collaboration below:

> We have discussed our own problems in the meetings, and this was the main reason for our improvement. For example, we discussed how to boost up energy or maintain students' engagement etc. What constitutes the contents was 'we.' It is the biggest advantage. (ST2)

With regards to the weaknesses, the data analyses produced three categories: course design, SMT and UTE-related problems, and resources. As the adaptation to the online medium was so rapid, the STs identified some characteristics of the course design as weaknesses. The weekly written tasks transferred from regular face-to-face teaching as a part of the national curriculum were identified as a major weakness. Referring to the difference between online and face-to-face teaching, the STs criticized the tasks. Lack of a common framework that specifies the details of the online practicum e.g., selection criteria for SMTs, attainment targets, roles and responsibilities etc. was identified as another weakness. The STs also complained that they got immersed into online teaching without sufficient background. The STs also added that the assessment of the practicum was subjective, but the STs suggested that common standards need to be developed for evaluation.

Under the second category, which was SMT and UTE-related problems; the STs mentioned inconsistencies among the stakeholders in terms of expectations, principles, and other main tenets. They also observed some SMTs' negative attitude towards online teaching. The STs reported that some SMTs viewed online teaching as temporary, so they did not effectively exploit the affordances. As a part of the ineffectiveness, the STs also referred to inadequate interactivity, which was deemed to be a primary weakness by the STs. The STs also claimed that many SMTs did not have prior experience or background in online teaching, so they could not present a good model for the STs. Some SMTs' and UTEs' lack of motivation for guiding STs was also observed as another weakness.

The third category of weaknesses was related to resources. The STs complained that they did not have adequate access to digital resources due to several reasons e.g. nonavailability of online forms of course materials, budget-related problems etc. Thus, the STs mentioned difficulties with reaching the resources.

Lastly, the STs stated that the SMTs and UTEs used rubrics or observation forms designed for face-to-face teaching, and they identified lack of a rubric designed for online observations as another weakness. The following quote provides evidence for the weaknesses in STs' own words:

> I think every teacher candidate should have the same opportunities and responsibilities. The students should not say 'Mr. XX is bad in practicum' or vice versa for their teachers. If there is a common framework for everyone, regardless of the university-based teacher, every teacher candidate will learn the same things and they will not feel as if there is an injustice between practicum groups. As long as there is a common framework and there are good mentor teachers who really want to teach how to teach, the online practicum will be a lot better in my opinion. (ST5)

As for the opportunities, five sub-categories emerged under two categories. The STs mainly referred to the facilities provided by the online modality that removes physical barriers. Within this scope, they viewed the possibility of observing multiple SMTs from different schools or locations as an opportunity. Attending classes or teaching online in the comfort of home without a need for commuting was reported as another opportunity. It was considered to be economic and timesaving. The STs also pointed to the technology-related issues; rapid advancements especially following the COVID-19 crisis and the growing popularity of online teaching as a natural outcome. They stated that they felt privileged as they experienced online teaching and gained familiarity with online resources before graduation. ST3's words represent the views on the opportunities:

> With the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly the whole world realized that teachers are not trained for distance education. For pre-service teachers like us practicum course became a great opportunity to learn how to teach online. (ST3)

The STs' identification of the threats created five sub-categories. They most frequently mentioned the digital divide as the main threat. The STs observed that moving to the online medium crystalized the technological haves and have-nots, and it was addressed as the main threat to be faced. The STs viewed lack of an audit mechanism for SMTs and UTEs as another threat. They opted for a control mechanism that eliminates the ineffective mentors. Parents', students', and some other parties' negative perceptions of online teaching was reported to be another threat. In addition, the STs stated that they had difficulties in building rapport with students due to distance, and it challenged them while teaching as students were reluctant to get involved in the classes. Lastly, the STs asserted that teaching without the support of body language further challenged them. The quotes below are illustrative:

> I am a person who uses her body language a lot and I feel like distance education limits me into a square box and wants me to pull a rabbit out of a hat. (ST2)

> Parents' attitude is very influential. Just a few days ago, Mrs X asked a student to respond but s/he did not react though s/he was online. Our mentor teacher concluded that s/he was not there, and then the student began to speak breathlessly to say that 'teacher, my mom sent me to dump, excuse me.' (ST6)

4.2 School-based Mentor Teachers' Perspectives

The categories and sub-categories with regards to the data analyses of the SWOT from SMTs' perspectives are displayed in Table 2.

The SMTs predominantly addressed the weaknesses in their assessment of the adaptation of practicum to the online modality. Regarding the strengths, the data analyses revealed three sub-categories which fit within a broad category: collaborative environment. The SMTs mentioned good relationship with UTEs and STs as the primary strength. In addition, they stated that online teaching was new to them as well, that is why, they marked concurrently learning with STs upon an emerging need as another strength. Lastly, the SMTs referred to STs' eagerness for improvement as another strength. The following quote demonstrates some sub-categories for the strengths:

> The STs were very eager and ready to learn, and it was the biggest advantage of the process. We altogether learn as it was something new to all of us. We had great conversations. I am sure we will have an everlasting relationship although we have not seen each other. (SMT5)

Table 2

SWOT Analysis Results from SMTs' Perspectives

Strengths	Weaknesses
Collaborative environment	*Course design*
- Good relationship with UTEs and STs - Concurrently learning with STs - STs' being eager for improvement	- Inconvenient written tasks - Lack of a common framework - Limited number of teaching implementations - Lack of extra-curricular activities - Lack of face-to-face components
	SMT and UTE-related problems
	- Inadequate interactivity in classes - SMTs' lack of prior experience and background - Some SMTs' lack of motivation - UTEs' expectations of strict lesson designs
	ST-related problems
	- Lack of background in online teaching - Insufficient involvement during observations
	Resources
	- Difficulties with reaching the resources - Lack of technical support for stakeholders - Lack of an online mentorship training program
Opportunities	**Threats**
Removing physical boundaries	- Digital divide
- Collaborating with international partners - Being time saving	- Difficulty in building rapport with students - Lack of support of body language - Inadequate opportunities offered to SMTs - Risk of easy loss of focus
Technology-related advantages	
- Video-enhanced feedback opportunities - STs' early familiarity with online teaching - Forced immersion into Ed-Tech tools	

For the weaknesses, the data analysis manifested four categories, the first of which was course design. Similar to the STs, the SMTs mentioned problems arising from the unexpected shift from face-to-face to the online medium e.g., inconvenient tasks and lack of a common framework. Additionally, the SMTs criticized the limited number of online teaching implementations, and stated that four teaching sessions were not enough for STs' development. The SMTs also stated that extra-curricular activities were missing in the online practicum unlike its face-to-face counterpart, which was reported to adversely affect the relationship between students and STs. They suggested adding online movie nights or online socialization sessions to help STs build rapport with the students.

As the second and third categories of weaknesses, the SMTs addressed the stakeholders' characteristics. In parallel to the STs, the SMTs viewed lack of interactivity as a major weakness. Referring to the students' absenteeism, the SMTs reported that the classes were not interactive at a desired level. As another common sub-category, the SMTs mentioned their and STs' lack of background in online teaching, which was marked as another weakness. Some SMTs shared their observations of some other SMTs' lack of motivation for guiding STs. They also complained that some UTEs expected very strict lesson plans from STs, which was reported to be a source of pressure over STs. Moreover, some SMTs noted that STs needed to be involved more throughout the observations by acting as an aid to SMTs rather than adopting a passive role of observation with a webcam turned off. It is illustrated in the quote below:

> Pre-service teachers should be involved more actively in the process as teacher's aides. They should open the cameras and microphones, be in touch with the students, conduct some activities (pre/post activity of the lesson can be directed by pre-service teachers). (SMT8)

In the last category of weaknesses, the SMTs addressed the resources. Almost for the same reasons with the STs, the SMTs also reported the difficulties with reaching the resources. In addition, the SMTs stated that they felt the lack of technical support during the pandemic, that is, they had to deal with the emerging technical problems themselves, thus they suggested cooperation with IT departments in the long run. The SMTs also added that no mentorship training for online practicum has been available for them, and they learned the process through trial and error, but they suggested such a training program in the long run. The following quotes are illustrative for some of the sub-categories:

> I cannot make sure that they are mentored by the right people. To what extent the mentor teachers were qualified and how much they could contribute to the development of the student teachers? I think this is a fundamental question. Even it is not a question rather a problem. There was a certificate demanded by the Ministry of National Education in the previous years. However, we know that this certificate did not meet any requirements in online practicum. (SMT1)

The opportunities reported by the SMTs fell into two categories: removing physical boundaries and technology-related advantages. In addition to its being time saving as also stated by the STs, the SMTs mentioned the possibilities of collaborating with international partners in an online practicum. Some SMTs especially referred to the distinctive privilege of EFL teachers in this sense due to the opportunities for communication provided by multilingual environments. Furthermore, the SMTs also deemed STs privileged for experiencing online teaching early in their career in the post-COVID era. The SMTs also stated that they were forced to get immersed into the world of digital tools due to the practicum while scaffolding the STs, and it was marked as another opportunity. The SMTs lastly addressed the feedback opportunities provided by online classes, in which all interactions and moments are recorded. SMT10's words below represent some sub-categories:

> I believe English courses are quite suitable for online teaching, and it is even better because you can establish international communication even in practicum, create a reason for speaking, and it would be a great opportunity for pre-service teachers. (SMT10)

The SMTs' data produced five sub-categories for threats posed by the adaptation of practicum to the online modality. Three of the sub-categories were also revealed in STs' answers. They similarly addressed the digital divide, difficulty in building rapport with students, and lack of support of body language as threats. Additionally, the SMTs complained that providing online mentorship for STs does not have extra benefits for them other than a small amount of money, and they deemed it as a threat to the quality of mentorship in the long run. They opted for some motivating opportunities for SMTs. They lastly referred to the risk for STs to lose their focus easily due to the distance, and they warned against this threat in the long-term planning. The following quote evidenced some constraints of the online modality:

> I remember that at the end of the previous practicum, students cried when STs left. They said hopefully they would become students' teachers in the future. They had a strong emotional bond but this term there was nothing like that. (SMT10)

4.3 University-based Teacher Educators' Perspectives

The categories and sub-categories of the analyses of the SWOT from the UTEs' perspectives are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
SWOT Analysis Results from UTEs' Perspectives

Strengths	Weaknesses
Collaborative environment	*Course design*
- Weekly web conferences with STs	- Lack of a common framework
- Informal dialogues with STs	- Lack of authenticity in online classes
- Feedback sessions	- Lack of face-to-face components
- Effective relationships among stakeholders	
	Resources
	- Difficulties with accessing digital materials
	- Lack of an online mentorship training program
	SMT-related problems
	- SMTs with inadequate background
	- Communication problems with some SMTs
	ST-related problems
	- Lack of background in online teaching
	- Underdeveloped digital literacy skills
Opportunities	**Threats**
Technology-related advantages	- Digital divide
- Technologically-enhanced world of teaching	- Scarcity of schools offering online courses
- Forced familiarity with digital tools	- Difficulty in building rapport with students
	- Negativities caused by the COVID-19 crisis

Collaborative environment was revealed to be the only category of strengths in UTEs' data analysis as well. They considered weekly web conferences with STs, informal dialogues, feedback sessions, and

effective relationships among stakeholders as the strengths. The quote below embodies the emerging category:

> When we had detailed feedback sessions as we did in face-to-face practicum, we removed the barriers. I mean it was the same with the face-to-face alternative. Group interactions significantly improved the quality, and this was I guess the only positive side. (UTE1)

For the weaknesses, the sub-categories fell into the same four categories with the results of the SMTs. The UTEs attributed the problems mainly to the course design, resources, SMT-related problems, and ST-related problems. Lack of authenticity appeared as a new sub-category. The UTEs stated that emergency remote teaching created unprecedented conditions for all the parties, and thus they shared their observations that the teaching and learning environments were dissimilar to the authentic or regular ones, so some UTEs viewed the adaptation as ineffective due to such a lack of authenticity. As another new sub-category, some UTEs pointed to STs' underdeveloped digital literacy skills. They said that although the STs were competent in technology, they were not digitally literate at a desired level. The following quote illustrates some of the categories for weaknesses:

> Neither of the mentor teachers was helpful for their development. Both teachers had traditional-outdated lessons where they required students to memorize vocabulary and grammar rules and our PSTs observed those teachers for nearly 72 hours for a 12-week period. They told me that they felt in between because what we have taught them during the last 3-4 years did not look like what their mentors did. So, I think, they experienced this dilemma and did not sometimes know what to do. (UTE3)

The opportunities addressed by the UTEs were not different from the ones revealed in SMTs and STs' results. They similarly referred to the advancement in technology especially subsequent to the COVID-19, and opportunities it may bring along for teachers who are competent in online teaching. Therefore, the UTEs regarded the conditions imposed by the pandemic as opportunities for STs.

Threats identified by the UTEs produced four sub-categories. In addition to the digital divide and difficulty in building rapport with the students, the UTEs reported two new sub-categories. They shared their observations that the number of schools offering online classes is still limited, thus it was considered to be a threat to an online practicum component as the UTEs had concerns that STs may not find enough number of alternative schools to attend. As another new sub-category, some UTEs mentioned the negativities caused by the COVID-19 crisis. They claimed that due to the forced intense immersion into technology during the COVID-19, people might generate a negative attitude towards online education due to the common weariness, so it was revealed as another threat. The words below exemplify some sub-categories:

> We need to integrate online practicum but I'm not sure how. There are very few schools offering online education, our preparatory school is offering it for example but how we would do it? We need administrative changes. I don't know if there are any schools offering face-to-face and online classes concurrently? (UTE2)

5. Discussion and Implications

The unprecedented conditions created by a global pandemic forced all the parties involved in teacher education to adapt the long-established traditions in a case of emergency. As a component of such practices,

practicum in EFL teacher education programs was also adapted to the online modality, and all the stakeholders collaboratively worked to educate STs in the most effective way possible. Within such a context, this research study aimed to explore Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of adapting practicum to the online modality from the perspectives of all groups of stakeholders (STs, SMTs, and UTEs) to draw evidence-based and sound conclusions for planning the long-term practices, as it has been self-evident that the COVID-19 marks a point of no return for the role of technology in education, and online components are not optional add-ons in teacher education curricula any more. The SWOT analyses of the results that were separately presented for each group of participants involve some common aspects to be considered for long-term planning.

5.1 Strengths

The common primary strengths identified by all three groups of participants were the qualified mentors and collaborative online environment. Although distance was marked as the major challenge of the adaptation, the results revealed that close collaboration and a constructive setting, which were previously identified as indispensable requirements of an effective practicum (Cirocki, Madyarov, & Baecher, 2020), can possibly be maintained at a distance, thus both SMTs' and UTEs' qualifications and motivation for collaboratively training STs are important variables. In the Turkish context, Korucu Kış (2021) also reported the benefits of collaboration and role of a constructive environment in STs' development during the practicum process. Qualified mentors, who were addressed as another common strength, once again proved that both SMTs and UTEs have a fundamental role in STs' growth during the online practicum process (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010). However, the qualifications need to be redefined according to the recently featured characteristics e.g. technology competence, online mentorship skills, and digital literacies as many STs complained that the SMTs they observed could not provide a good role model for them in terms of their technology competence, or some SMTs themselves expressed the need for further development in the use of online modality, so SMTs' and UTEs' qualifications should be reconsidered and necessary training programs, especially on online mentorship practices, should be organized. Previously Güngör (2022) similarly revealed how working with competent mentors would be of use for STs within an online practicum course, thus it can be stated that qualified mentors in a collaborative online practicum environment have a fundamental role.

5.2 Weaknesses

Four main categories emerged for all three groups of participants with regards to the common weaknesses of the adaptation to the online modality. The characteristics and elements directly transferred from face-to-face practicum were criticized with an emphasis on the differences between the two mediums. In other words, the participants pointed to the blend of "sameness and difference" (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Thus, it was once again proven that face-to-face teaching and teacher education are significantly different from their online counterparts (Compton, 2009; Hampel & Stickler, 2005). In the earlier studies conducted in the Turkish context, the distinctive nature of online teaching was emphasized as well. In Ersin, Atay, and Mede (2020)'s study, for instance, the STs stated that they appreciated the benefits and understood the nature of online teaching thanks to the online practicum experience, so it might be inferred that components in the curriculum with regards to the face-to-face teaching need to be supported with the ones addressing online teaching.

Lack of a common framework that designs the practicum for the online modality appeared as the most frequently mentioned weakness. It was yielded that almost all aspects of the practicum ranging from the weekly written tasks to the definitions of stakeholders' roles and responsibilities need to be revisited

within a new framework. As the former studies in Turkey (Ersin, Atay, & Mede, 2020; Güngör, 2022) also suggested, online components should be added into the regular practicum, and while designing the courses, such a framework needs to be considered. In addition, SMTs and UTEs need to be selected carefully as many weaknesses were attributed to the stakeholders, who were considered to be inadequate. As another category of weaknesses, the participants commonly referred to the difficulties in access to the digital resources due both to scarcity of available course materials and to the financial reasons. Lack of a protocol designed for online observations was another weakness, and it was also addressed by Karam et al. (2020). Then, course design, stakeholders' characteristics, and resources appear as the fundamental areas to be considered in the long-term planning.

5.3 Opportunities

All three groups of participants underlined the growing popularity of technology especially in the post-COVID era, and how it will most likely alter the established universal culture. Therefore, all the groups deemed themselves to be fortunate to experience online teaching and gain familiarity with the digital tools although it was imposed. This opportunity has also been reported in the previous research (Ersin, Atay, & Mede, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Robinson & Rusznyak). Removal of the physical boundaries was revealed as the second common opportunity. The participants appreciated the online modality as it does not require commuting, which means it saves both time and money. In addition, the possibilities of building international relationships especially for EFL STs were valued.

5.4 Threats

As for the common threats, the digital divide and difficulties in building rapport with students were addressed. The participants all agreed that the pandemic has given prominence to technological haves and have-nots, so all groups' technological facilities were marked as a primary determinant of outcomes in the online practicum as well. It also frequently appeared in earlier studies as a major threat (Assunçao Flores & Gago, 2020; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Robinson & Rusznyak, 2020). In the local context of Turkey as well, Ersin, Atay, and Mede (2020) emphasized the role of technological haves and have-nots in the design of an online practicum, and strongly recommended that digital divide must seriously be considered for the effectiveness of online practices. In addition, the participants called attention to challenges caused by distance, and mentioned the difficulties in building rapport with students due to several reasons such as common absenteeism, low level of interaction, limited opportunities of socialization and creating emotional bond etc. Low level of interaction was observed as a major challenge in other contexts as well (Babanoğlu, 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

6. Conclusion

The forced move upon the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis from the face-to-face to the online medium in practicum in EFL teacher education programs has brought along both advantages and drawbacks. With an awareness of the irreversibility of fundamental changes stimulated by the global pandemic, we systematically explored the three groups of stakeholders' perspectives concerning the SWOT of adapting practicum to make sound conclusions in the long term. The findings revealed worthy implications for practice as previously discussed; however, it must be noted once again that adapting practicum to add online components or redesigning the existing frameworks is an inevitable requirement for EFL teacher education programs in the post-COVID era. Thus, further research that enlightens this inevitable shift is an obvious need. In this sense, quantitative or mixed-methods research studies reporting the views of large

groups of people will be appreciated. In addition, an exploration of stakeholders' experiences of online or blended practicum during regular times will also help policy makers and practitioners do more objective and comprehensive assessments as this study was conducted during a closure period and stakeholders had to simultaneously dealt with many other obstacles, thus the findings might be affected by the external factors caused by the pandemic.

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Appendix 1
Sample prompts for weekly reflective journals of student teachers

Reflection Paper 4

Based on your observations of online classes for several weeks and your subjective assessments, what are the **necessities** for an effective online English language teaching? To what extent your school-based mentor teacher meets them? Please discuss in detail.

Based on these necessities, in what specific areas your mentor teacher has **lacks**? Do you think you have similar lacks? Please reflect on your own missing points in your knowledge base and competencies. Please provide specific evidence for your response.

What do you **want** to especially learn or know regarding online English language teaching based on your observations and initial reflections?

Please take another detailed look at the indicators below (Elmendorf and Song, 2015). Please assess yourself based on these indicators. For each indicator, please reflect on your own **readiness** for online teaching prior to your implementations. If there is anything you deem required for an effective online teaching but not included in the list of indicators, please specify it and assess yourself based on these as well.

Elmendorf, D. C., & Song, L. (2015). Developing indicators for a classroom observation tool on pedagogy and technology integration: A Delphi study. *Computers in the Schools*, *32*(1), 1-19.

Reflection Paper 6

a) Please thoroughly reflect on each of the following after your FIRST implementation;

1. The feedback meeting: What do you think about the session in general? Does it help you realize your strengths and weaknesses? If yes, in what specific ways? If no, what are your suggestions for improvement? Do you learn anything concrete in this meeting? How do you think this meeting might contribute to your second implementation? Reflect on any other points that could be relevant.
2. The oral feedback: Does the oral individual feedback you received from me help you realize your strengths and weaknesses? Did you learn anything specific here? Would you prefer written or oral feedback? Why? Please reflect on any other relevant points in detail.
3. The model class: What do you think about the class you observed? Does it provide you with a good model? If yes, in what ways? If no, why do you think so? Do you think it might contribute to the improvement of your practice in any ways? If yes, how? After you watch this class, what are your opinions about the role of experience? Please reflect on any other relevant aspects in detail.
4. Literature: What do you learn about the weaknesses discussed in the feedback sessions from the literature? Do you think the strategies offered in the literature will work? Please thoroughly reflect on any relevant details.

b) Based on all of the above, please prepare an action plan to improve the quality of your teaching. What solid steps do you intend to take for your second implementation? Please give all the details of your action plan.

c) Please observe your mentor teacher's classes in the light of the action plan you have been designing throughout the week. Does s/he teach in the way you planned in your action plan? If yes, please specify the details. If no, how would his/her classes be different if s/he implemented the improvement strategies on your mind? Please discuss in detail.

Reflection Paper 8

1. Please reflect in a very detailed way on your THIRD teaching implementation by taking the instructions below into account. **Please make sure that your reflection paper responds to all the questions below <u>comprehensively</u>.**

BEFORE THE IMPLEMENTATION

- How did you feel? Why?
- How did you design your class? What ways/resources did you use?
- Did you benefit from the feedback you have received about your first implementation? If yes, in what specific ways? If no, what might improve the quality of the feedback?
- Do you think the observations you have made so far would help you plan and implement your teaching? If yes, in what specific ways? If no, why do you think so?
- Did your experience of the first and second teaching implementations have any influences on the preparation of the third teaching session? If yes, in what specific ways?
- Please describe the preparation process in detail and mention any details that could be relevant.

DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION

- Please use the performance indicators (Elmendorf and Song, 2015) to critically reflect on your performance. Please use the indicators as prompts and feel free to add any other points.
- Please add any other comments, reflections, notes that could be relevant.

AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION

- How do you feel following the third implementation?
- When you compare the third implementation with the first two, how do you assess your performance? In what specific ways is the third teaching session better or worse than the first and the second one?
- Was your implementation in the same way you planned?
- What are the overall strengths of your implementation? Please comment in a detailed way.
- What are the overall weaknesses of your implementation? Please comment in a detailed way.
- What do you think about the feedback you receive from the university-based teacher educator and school-based mentor teacher about your second implementation?
- Have you observed any effects -either positive or negative- of the feedback regarding your first and second teaching sessions on the third one? Please describe in detail.
- Please add any other relevant comments.

2. Please critically reflect on your observations of the present week. Do they raise your awareness of any needs you have for online English language teaching? Please comment reflectively and critically.

Reflection Paper 11

Please reflect in a very detailed way on your progress -if you think that you have made any- from the first to the fourth teaching implementation. Please feel free to reflect on any relevant aspect regarding your development. What have been the challenges and how have you dealt with them? What do you think about the feedback you have received from the university-based teacher educator and your school-based mentor teacher? In what specific areas you felt inadequate and if there have been any changes in these areas? If you say yes, how have they changed? If no, what would you need for a change? Please do not feel limited to these questions and add any relevant comments and reflections on the process.

Appendix 2
Open-ended questionnaires

1. Questionnaire for Student Teachers of English

Please use the following link to reach a PDF copy of the open-ended questionnaire delivered to STs through Google Forms.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Kf87Zr0RnClWGQkHqum_HDhVqZBYLdSV/view?usp=sharing

2. Questionnaire for School-Based Mentor Teachers of English

Please use the following link to reach a PDF copy of the open-ended questionnaire delivered to SMTs through Google Forms.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KzaJPQBL1E7tNYT-Fy1SHDPASq2Npc-z/view?usp=sharing

3. Questionnaire for University-Based Teacher Educators

Please use the following link to reach a PDF copy of the open-ended questionnaire delivered to SMTs through Google Forms.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zJFXslF_TVpnu-RgE34noQaaWpvYkAtN/view?usp=sharing